

\*\*\*NEWSFLASH\*\*\* COVID-19 Testing Programme Test-to-Return



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To

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Dear colleagues

As you will be aware the government is introducing coronavirus (COVID-19) testing programmes into schools and colleges from the start of 2021. This will help deliver the national priority of keeping as many pupils, students and teachers as possible in their education settings while fighting the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

There are two separate programmes for testing asymptomatic staff, pupils and students, both of which use the Lateral Flow Tests which provide a rapid response within 30 minutes and are not sent off to a laboratory for processing. In all circumstances, in the event of a positive test, the individual will need to self-isolate and [arrange for a confirmation standard coronavirus \(COVID-19\) PCR test](#). If this is also positive, they will need to continue to self-isolate and follow the standard guidance from NHS Test and Trace.

The new programmes are:

1) [Test-to-return](#)

Settings with secondary-age pupils, including special schools and alternative provision, and FE providers, will be offered the opportunity to test their pupils and students in the week of the 4 January. The government encourage as many as possible to take up the offer and will be offering help, support and facilities to settings to enable them to do this.

All settings will need to provide on-site provision for all vulnerable young people, including those with EHC plans, and the other priority groups as set out in the full guidance [Schools and childcare settings: return in January 2021](#) and [Further education \(FE\) providers: return in January 2021](#) for the week commencing 4 January. Remote education will need to be provided for all other pupils and students, having regard for the [remote education expectations](#)

All secondary-aged pupils and FE students will be offered two tests in the first week so that full education provision can resume by 11 January. If the first test is positive the individual should immediately self-isolate and have this positive test confirmed with a standard Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. If the first test is negative, they should be tested again ideally 3 to 5 days later (no fewer than 3).

Testing is voluntary and all pupils and students will be expected to attend their setting from 11 January regardless of whether a test has been undertaken (unless they are self-isolating because they have tested positive for coronavirus, have symptoms or have been advised to isolate by NHS Test and Trace). Pupils and students should be encouraged to have a test where

possible, but we recognise that testing may not be feasible for some children and young people.

With regards to attendance, the advice for settings is:

- All **specialist** settings and **alternative provision** settings with secondary-aged pupils should plan for full-time on-site provision for all pupils in the first week of term.
  - Where parents are concerned about their child with an EHC plan attending school during this week we recommend they discuss these concerns with the school. As usual, schools are able, in certain circumstances, to grant leaves of absence where parents make a request. Schools should consider applications for leaves of absence from parents on an individual basis taking into account the specific facts and circumstances, and the relevant background context behind the request. If granted, remote education should be provided.
  - In mixed-age settings, only secondary-aged pupils and students should be offered a test. We are prioritising these age groups due to older children and young adults having higher rates of COVID-19.
- **Mainstream secondary schools** should prepare for a staggered start back to planned on-site provision in the first week of term to allow for all pupils to be tested ahead of normal schooling resuming. This should involve:
  - Full-time on-site provision from the first day of term in the week commencing 4 Jan for all vulnerable children and young people (including those with EHC plans), the children of critical workers, and pupils in years 11 and 13.
  - Priority for testing should be given to the groups listed above and the workforce.
  - Remote education being provided for all other pupils when they are at home.
  - Where parents are concerned about their child with an EHC plan attending school during this week we recommend they discuss these concerns with the school. As usual, schools are able, in certain circumstances, to grant leaves of absence where parents make a request. Schools should consider applications for leaves of absence from parents on an individual basis taking into account the specific facts and circumstances, and the relevant background context behind the request. If granted, remote education should be provided.

- **FE providers**, including sixth form colleges, general FE providers and special post-16 institutions, should plan for a phased start back to on-site provision during the first week of term to allow for student testing ahead of normal education resuming. This should include:
  - usual timetabled on-site provision from the first day of term for vulnerable young people, including those with an EHC plan, and other priority groups.
- **Early years and primary schools** (including primary aged children in specialist settings) should re-open as planned from their advertised first day of term and allow all pupils to attend for full-time on-site provision.

To deliver testing at this speed and scale Armed forces personnel will support directly through planning with schools and colleges, in every local area. The remaining testing workforce will be made up of volunteers and agency staff and reasonable costs will be reimbursed. Settings that opt into this programme will need to provide a few members of staff to support the testing process. More detailed operational guidance will be issued shortly.

## 2) Weekly rapid tests

This DHSC programme will build on the success of recent pilots and will initially apply to:

- secondary schools and colleges; and
- all specialist settings (irrespective of pupil age-range) and alternative provision

It will be available to all the above settings from the start of January, and you will be able to opt-in when you choose. Once the programme is underway in your setting the asymptomatic testing is voluntary, and it remains the choice of individual staff and pupils/students whether to take one of the tests.

This programme will use the rapid tests to enable:

- **Weekly staff testing**
- **Serial Testing** - daily testing over a seven-day period for staff or pupils who have been identified as a close contact of a positive coronavirus (COVID-19) case. These close contacts will be offered the opportunity to be tested daily, with no requirement to self-isolate unless they test positive, helping to preserve face-to-face education.

Those who have been identified as a close contact of a positive case but who cannot/choose not to take the serial tests, will need to self-isolate for the standard 10 days as is currently the case.

The Government will support settings to set-up and staff the testing provision. Test kits, PPE and training will be provided and the DfE will provide an advice line. The Department will work with you to continually review and update the

guidance to ensure it is relevant for the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and for the staff who support them.

**Regards**

**Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Division**



HM Government

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